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ABSTRACT

Corporate education is an extensive, multifaceted endeavor, costing billions of dollars, educating millions of people, and absorbing many working hours annually. Offerings range from remedial to postgraduate level management and technical courses. Corporate educators are fulfilling educational needs of nontraditional students, often before colleges and universities respond. These educational efforts could threaten the health and devalue the worth of higher education, but in fact, corporate education is compatible with--indeed complements--traditional higher education. Corporate education is structured similarly to collegiate instruction, facilitating transfer and student mobility and making possible a variety of cooperative efforts. Corporate programs have also opened channels of communication between business and schools concerning educational content and methods. The growth of corporate education is a stimulus to both internal collegiate debates and public policy-making. Many profitable educational ventures have begun with employers' recognition of their responsibilities to employees. Corporate education is well-established, a large enterprise, and increasingly professional. There is room for accommodation and cooperation that will serve both learners and their educational providers. (MSE)

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Corporate Education

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What Is Corporate Education?

This report discusses the extensive education and training programs established and run by corporations and other organizations, largely profit-making enterprises whose primary purpose is something other than education, in the context of traditional higher education. As used in this report, "corporate education" is education offered by a business or industry for its own employees.

How Extensive Is Corporate Education?

Corporate education is an extensive, multifaceted endeavor, costing billions of dollars, educating millions of people, and absorbing many working hours annually.

It is estimated, for example, that approximately $30 billion to $50 billion is spent on formal employee education and $180 billion on informal, on-the-job, education. Employees in companies with 500 or more employees—4.4 million people—can expect to receive frequent instruction paid for and provided by their employers.

Is Corporate Education a Threat to Higher Education?

As colleges and universities strive to respond to the needs of nontraditional students, they often find that corporate educators have preceded them. Corporations, with the assistance of the American Council on Education and the New York Board of Regents, have had their courses evaluated, frequently leading to the granting of credit for corporate coursework by colleges and universities.

Courses offered by corporations range from remedial to postgraduate level management and technical courses. Corporations have even founded their own colleges, known as "corporate colleges." These educational efforts potentially could threaten the health, and devalue the worth of, higher education, but in fact, corporate education is compatible with—indeed complements—traditional higher education.

Higher education in the United States has been responsive to the needs of the workplace since the beginning of the federal period. The prevailing dialogue in higher education has long been the weighing of tradeoffs—practically and philosophically—between general education and what now is called "career education."

The formal recognition of instruction

independent of the providers is a multifaceted and complex enterprise on the postsecondary education scene in and of itself. These efforts have accomplished two things. First, the structural conformity of noncollegiate instruction with collegiate instruction (for example, associating credit hours with contact hours) facilitates transfers and students' mobility and opens up an array of potential cooperative efforts between businesses and colleges. Second, they have served as a major channel of communication between school and corporation about educational content and methods. This report presents the interaction between corporate education and these recognition processes, a path by which noncollegiate education can wend its way into the most traditional patterns of higher education.

Innovations find their way into higher education in five ways, one of which is when external institutions appear on the scene to challenge, titillate, and/or draw attention to significant issues. The emergence of corporate education with its interest in formal recognition offers opportunities and challenges to higher education in the way it teaches, the students it seeks, and the perception of the purposes of education. The growth of corporate education is a stimulus to both internal collegiate debates and public policy decision making.

NOTE: This ERIC Digest is a summary of **Formal Recognition of Employer-Sponsored Instruction: Conflict and Collegiality in Postsecondary Education** by the same authors (ERIC ED 286 437). This publication was prepared partially with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department.

What Can Be Expected from the Proliferation of Corporate Education?

Many profitable educational ventures have been initiated that were provoked by employers' recognition of their responsibility for developing their employees. The American University, for example, using its own faculty, offers an MS in toxicology at Litton Industries, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology cooperates in an education program with IBM and Digital Equipment. An indirect benefit to colleges resulting from an increased awareness of conditions in higher education on the part of business and industry has been the use of modern technology by colleges and universities to educate future employees. And a national discussion on the role of colleges and universities in American society has been stimulated by heightened awareness of shared national needs.

Corporate education is well established, a large enterprise, and increasingly more professional. The factors that led employers to begin to educate and train their employees continue to affect their choices as technology changes, as businesses create proprietary information to share with their employees, and as employees need to learn new skills or enhance current skills to make a contribution to the workplace. If traditional collegiate institutions and associations ignore or discount corporate education, they will do so at their own peril. There is room for accommodation and cooperation that will serve learners and their providers as well.

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